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SIPDIS

DEPT FOR AF/W, INR/AA
BAGHDAD FOR DMCCULLOUGH

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TAGS: PGOV NI
SUBJECT: NIGERIA: AMBASSADOR'S MEETING WITH SOKOTO STATE
GOVERNOR WAMAKKO

REF: A. 07 ABUJA 1558
1B. 08 ABUJA 2148

Classified By: Political Counselor Walter Pflaumer for reasons 1.4. (b
& d).

¶1. (C) Summary: On February 11, Ambassador (accompanied by Poloffs) met with Governor Aliyu Wamakko of Sokoto State. The Governor denied that Sokoto has any religious conflict problems, and said the greatest challenge the state faces is poverty - with youth unemployment, low school enrollment, and poor health care as hurdles he must face. Wamakko said that the government is attempting to reduce poverty through its focus on youth training programs, access to education, health care, agriculture, and sustainable power supply. He agreed to assist with polio eradication campaigns. Finally, he asked if we could provide assistance with health care and other training. Ambassador said that she would ensure that our PEPFAR coordinator was in touch with his office. His claim that Sokoto is void of religious conflict may be accurate for the time being, but ignores continued tensions between Sunni and Shia Muslims. Wamakko's success as the leader of one of Nigeria's poorest states is vital) the well-being of the people of Sokoto will depend on it. Wamakko is, U.S. educated, having a masters degree in education from University of Pittsburg and is positively disposed to the U.S. End Summary.

¶2. (U) In a meeting with the Ambassador following his visa interview on February 11, Sokoto Governor Aliyu Wamakko maintained that, unlike in Jos, Plateau State, there are no problems with religious conflict in Sokoto, although this can be used politically, during elections, he admitted. He noted that poverty is the major challenge facing his administration, thus his State Government is working to reduce poverty in the following ways:

-- Youth training: Sokoto state is attempting to reduce unemployment and prevent young people from turning to drug use by offering youth training. The government sponsored 11,000 young people last year to learn skills such as mechanics, carpentry, solar power, shea butter processing, etc. Each local government authority (LGA) has a training center. Wamakko told the Ambassador that his goal for 2009 is to train between 15,000 and 17,000 people.

-- Improved Education: Sokoto state is encouraging education through its focus on teachers' training, increased food programs, and the cancellation of all school fees. The strategy, according to Wamakko, is three-pronged: to address infrastructure, teachers', and students' needs.

-- Improved Health Care: The state is providing free access to prenatal health care and distributing free drugs to hospitals which are monitored by local committees to prevent misuse. In response to the Ambassador's request for help with polio eradication programs, Wamakko agreed to do what he could to help with logistics and leadership. According to him, fears of the polio vaccine have subsided in his state. The Governor acknowledged that poverty can only be eliminated if people are healthy. Ambassador introduced the Mission's PEPFAR coordinator to the Governor and asked that she look into the possibility of training health care workers in conjunction with HIV/AIDS and polio programs run by CDC and USAID.

-- Agricultural Assistance: As agriculture is the mainstay of the people in Sokoto State, Wamakko said the government subsidizes fertilizer and is attempting to improve farming through mechanization and partnerships. He noted that a team recently returned from a trip to Argentina to study their cattle industry. He added that food storage is also a concern as they have difficulty preserving farm output. The Ambassador mentioned humanitarian programs under DOD that might assist with building food storage facilities.

-- Sustainable Energy: In addition to the power supplied by
ABUJA 00000286 002 OF 002

the national grid, Wamakko said that Sokoto has a hydroelectric plant and a gas turbine plant which supply 30 additional megawatts of power per day. (Note: Average electricity output for the nation in 2008 was 2,800 megawatts. End Note.) Wamakko said that the hope is that a sustainable power supply will encourage industry and therefore reduce poverty. As such, Sokoto state has entered into an agreement with an American firm to construct an initial 30 megawatt power plant with an option for two more with a combined total of up to 100 megawatts between the three plants.

¶3. (SBU) Wamakko told Ambassador that the 2009 budget for Sokoto State is 54 billion Naira (\$367 million) and he plans to request a supplementary bill again in 2009, as he did in ¶2008. (Comment: We do not know what the federal allocation to Sokoto State will be for 2009, although we expect it may be far short of what Wamakko is expecting, given the decline in the price of oil and the global economic downturn. End Comment.) Governor Wamakko said he would like to have more frequent communication with the U.S. Mission to Nigeria on programs and training. He also asked for assistance with health training.

¶4. (C) Comment: Governor Wamakko is right to focus his efforts on improving the living standards of the people of his state and increasing the power supply to stimulate industry. Sokoto State is among the poorest states in Nigeria, with higher than the national average rates of poverty and illiteracy. Continued desertification and a swelling population will mean even more competition for already insufficient resources over the coming years. Wamakko's success is vital) the well-being of the people of Sokoto will depend on it.

¶5. (C) Comment Continued. We note the Governor's assertion that there is no religious conflict in Sokoto state; we believe, however, that he is splitting hairs on this count. Despite the lack of a history of Christian-Muslim conflict (generally as a result of a very small Christian population), there have been several instances of Sunni-Shia conflict in the state, most importantly in July 2007 following the murder of the Imam Dan-Mashiya (Ref. A). In October 2008 Sheikh

Abubakar Jibril, Chief Imam of Faru Faru Juma'a Friday Mosque in Sokoto, told PolAssistant the situation has now calmed down in the area (Ref. B); but some tensions remain. End Comment.

¶6. (U) This cable was coordinated with Consulate Lagos.
SANDERS